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Revisiting Russo-Japanese Hegemonic Rivalry in East Asia before 1904: Korean Railroads

Sangpil Jin

Abstract. Illustrating overlooked aspects of a hegemonic conflict surrounding the Korean peninsula amidst changing geopolitical dynamics in the Far East before the Russo-Japanese war, this analysis provides an alternate reading of international history during the age of “New Imperialism”. With Korea’s railroad system enmeshed with Russo-Japanese rivalry in Northeast Asia, a technologically inferior Korea could only resort to concession diplomacy and, relatedly, neutralisation – also attempted by Russia – to preserve its fragile independence. Despite the high hopes that accompanied them, such efforts were unable to protect Korea and its railroads from Japanese control as the clouds of the Russo-Japanese War overshadowed the region.

Originally conceived to transport passengers and material goods in the nineteenth century, the political establishments in modern and modernising Powers learnt to appreciate the economic and military dimensions of railways, as the combination of steam locomotion and iron rails allowed armies to deploy quickly a large number of their forces over long distances. Strategic

planners equated the establishment of a railhead in a territory with a military presence.¹ Britain was the first major Power to recognise the importance of railroads as a means to buttress its overseas Imperial interests, constructing railways in India. France, Germany, Russia, and Japan later joined it, all intent on expanding their spheres of influence in continental Asia. The latter two Powers turned their geostrategic focus on Korea's railroad concessions.

There are several scholarly works on the major Powers' competition for railroad concessions in Korea. Whilst focusing on the Trans-Siberian Railway [TSR], Seonghak Gang also touches the nexus of Korean railroads and Russia's Far Eastern geostrategy.² Cheolwu Yi investigates Japan's Imperial designs to control the railroads in Korea and Korean efforts to resist them.³ Taeheon Jeong reckons that Japan's exploitation of Korean railroads facilitated Japanese expansion into continental Asia.⁴ The Japanese scholar, Yūichi Inoue, places the international history of East Asian railroads within the framework of the Anglo-Japanese alliance;⁵ whilst Yoshihisa T. Matsusaka contends that Japan counted on Korean railroads to cement Tokyo's presence in Manchuria.⁶ Amongst Western scholars, Ian Nish faults competition for control of key Chinese and Korean railroads as triggering the Russo-Japanese war.⁷ Steven J. Ericson emphasises strategic motives that shaped Tokyo's decision to acquire the main railways in Korea, revealing an intimate partnership between Japan's commercial interests and its government.⁸ Felix Patrikeeff and Harold Shukman detail the evolution of symbiosis between railroads and empires, explaining how Russo-Japanese competition over railroads affected their bid for hegemonic control in the Far East.⁹

These studies, however, tend to discount the complex geopolitical landscape that influenced Korea's railroad concession diplomacy. Above all, no studies discuss neutralisation, a concept floated to reduce the probability of direct conflict between Japan and Russia over Korea.

This analysis delves deeper into the critical role played by the Korean railroad system in shaping Russo-Japanese rivalry before 1904, carefully illustrating multi-level diplomatic interactions amongst Japan, Russia, and Korea involving this critical infrastructure. Ultimately, the Russo-Japanese race to control Korean railroads prevented Korea from exerting effective autonomy on the regional stage through balanced diplomacy and neutralisation.

Severely weakened by the Second Opium War from 1856 to 1860, China signed the Treaty of Beijing in 1860 with Britain, France, and Russia. Subsequently, the Russians acquired the Maritime Province, contiguous with eastern Manchuria, allowing it to use this territory as a bridgehead for expansion into the Far East. This treaty also meant Korea would share a border with Russia, portending a closer interaction between the two monarchies. The TSR epitomised this new strategic reality. In 1856, the governor-general of Eastern Siberia, Nikolay N. Muravyov-Amursky, suggested building a railroad to defend better Russia's Far Eastern domain.¹⁰ Construction plans for the TSR took shape when Foreign Minister Nikolay de Giers received letters from a Ministry consultant in 1880 contending, amidst China's increasing military spending, that Russia had to strengthen its navy at Vladivostok and expand its military presence along the Siberian border. This consultant added that the Siberian railway would be the most effective mechanism.¹¹

In 1886, the governor-generals of Amur, Andrey N. Korf, and Irkutsk, Nikolay P. Ignatyev, recommended constructing the Siberian railroad to Tsar Alexander III to deter potential Chinese invasion. Keen to assist the relatively backward Far Eastern region of his Empire,¹² the tsar ordered a feasibility study for the TSR in 1887.¹³ Finance Minister Ivan A. Vyshnegradsky quashed this plan, however, citing budgetary constraints and the proposed construction of a railroad in Persia.¹⁴ It took the 17 March 1887 tsarist edict to formalise the plan

to connect the entire Siberian region with Europe.¹⁵ The benefits of the TSR were substantial,¹⁶ as its opening would ensure year-round mass travel to the eastern periphery and extend the Empire's geostrategic heartland into Northeast Asia, thereby realising Mackinder's "geographical pivot" of history and reshaping Russia's outlook as the "strategic heartland of Northeast Asia".¹⁷

Construction of the TSR, stretching from Moscow to Vladivostok, began in 1891.¹⁸ On 31 May, Alexander III's son and successor, Nicholas, laid the foundation stone for the station on the Ussuri section.¹⁹ At the end of 1891, a special body, the TSR committee, emerged to deal with economic development and colonisation of Siberia and, in 1893, Sergei Witte, Vyshnegradsky's successor, became its chairman.²⁰ Russia was able to embark on this ambitious project thanks to a formal alliance with France in 1894, a diplomatic arrangement that facilitated a bilateral financial partnership;²¹ and its government recognised the economic value of linking European Russia, western Siberia, and the Pacific to match Russia's political and strategic ambitions in the region.²² Such a strategy also reflected Russia's embrace of an army-led defensive strategy in East Asia after the Port Hamilton incident involving Anglo-Russian rivalry,²³ owing to the need for quick deployment of troops to the Far East and bolstering the defence of its interior.²⁴

Russia's TSR project sparked a senior Japanese Imperial military advisor, Prince Yamagata Aritomo, to remark apprehensively in 1892: "Ten years from now, with the completion of the Trans-Siberian railway, Russia will be in a position to invade Mongolia, and who can tell whether or not in the future she will reach China".²⁵ Thus, Japan had to consolidate its position in Korea before the completion of the TSR, as the "railroad would allow an enormous increase in Russia's power projection capability".²⁶ Yet, Yamagata recognised that the

TSR could advance Japan's strategic interests in Asia, in 1894, envisaging a new railway that could reach the Chinese region that bordered India.²⁷ His analysis demonstrated his unique ability to exploit a strategic competitor's geostrategic initiative to expand Japan's hegemonic presence in continental Asia. Other Japanese establishment figures also sought to project Tokyo's economic and military power in Korea by controlling its key railroad and, in 1891, the Japanese military anticipated the possible strategic role of Korean railroads in future warfare. The assistant chief of the army staff, Kawakami Sōroku, advocated a Seoul-Busan railway, with Busan potentially serving as "the most probable major port of disembarkation for Japanese troops on the continent".²⁸ The next year, the Japanese consul in Busan surveyed a possible Seoul-Busan railway route, and the army general staff, the Foreign Ministry, and Shibusawa Eiichi, a stakeholder in the Dai-Ichi Bank, received the report.²⁹ By the early 1890s, the government and private interests in Tokyo were working hand-in-hand to direct Japan's strategic gaze towards Korean railroads.

In August 1894, as China and Japan edged closer to war, Japan's minister to Korea, Ōtori Keisuke, lobbied the Korean government for rights to build lines linking Seoul, Incheon, and Busan; it eventually concluded a provisional agreement with Tokyo. In November, armed with this interim accord, a railroad engineer led a team of 100 technicians to assess possible Korean routes. Later in 1894, they concocted a ¥2,000,000 plan to construct rail lines for military purposes.³⁰ After successfully waging war against China from July 1894 to April 1895, Japan dominated the Korean peninsula and obtained Taiwan and an indemnity of about ¥300,000,000 from Beijing. In February 1895, three Japanese businessmen, Ōmiwa Chōbei, Takeuchi Tsuna, and Ōzaki Saburō, resolved to establish a Korean central bank and build two rail lines: Seoul-Incheon and Seoul-Busan. Ōzaki, a former protégé of ex-Chancellor Sanjō Sanetomi, boasted

close ties with bureaucratic circles, and Ōmiwa was a prominent financier.³¹ Both Japan's government and business community were keen to exploit the full potential of Korean railroads.

Against this backdrop, the TSR received a sudden boost when Russia leased the Liaodong peninsula from China, an outgrowth of its participation in the Triple Intervention. Launched on 23 April, this intrusion involved the Russian, French, and German ministers at Tokyo backed by their governments limiting Japan's hegemonic ambitions in the Far East. They argued that the Japanese concession on the Liaodong peninsula threatened both Chinese and Korean independence.³² Subsequently, on 1 August 1895, the British minister at Tokyo, Sir Ernest Satow, met with Prime Minister Hirobumi Itō to discuss the Korean peninsula's shifting geopolitical situation. Satow asked whether Russia desired to "bring their railroad through Manchuria or to a port in Korea". The prime minister commented that Russian schemes in Korea went far beyond acquiring a port and spoke in favour of Japan's actions to benefit Korean independence.³³ Then on 26 September, Itō took an issue with Satow's observation, which reckoned that some high-ranking Japanese officials believed the object of the Sino-Japanese War was to "forestall the completion of the Siberian Railway".³⁴ Itō's view of tsarist policy displayed Japan's relatively weak geopolitical position in Korea and, on 3 June 1896, Russia won another diplomatic victory with the Li-Lobanov Treaty. This pact secured Chinese agreement to build the Chinese Eastern Railroad [CER], which would expedite the transportation of Russian troops to Northeast China by linking the TSR with the northeastern Chinese provinces and Vladivostok.³⁵ Russia made these daring moves because Japan remained too weak militarily to oppose them.³⁶

However, six days after concluding this treaty, Prince Lobanov, the tsarist foreign minister, signed a protocol with Yamagata demonstrating St. Petersburg's desire to avoid any escalation of Russo-Japanese tensions. The Lobanov-Yamagata protocol cemented Russia's

political primacy in Korea by acknowledging the legality of the Korean cabinet formed at the Russian legation in Seoul and by giving St. Petersburg the right to despatch troops to Korea in case of emergency.³⁷ Additionally, it paved Russia's way to obtain special rights in Korea through a secret agreement with the Korean minister in Russia, allowing St. Petersburg to despatch a financial advisor, military instructors, and several hundred soldiers to Korea.³⁸ It enabled the tsarist regime to monitor northern Korea reliably and, from there, protect Russian-controlled Chinese railroads in Manchuria.³⁹

The regional balance of power thus appeared to be shifting towards Russia, with Korea sheltering under its influence. On 11 February 1896, because of Japanese interference in Korean politics, including the assassination of the Korean empress, Min, who looked for closer Russian ties to counter the Japanese, the emperor, Gojong, fled to the Russian legation, creating an atmosphere conducive to more effective railroad diplomacy. He ruled from the legation for a year. Despite the Korean sovereign's intent, Russo-Japanese tensions surrounding Korean railroads soon resurfaced. In August, drawing on a tentative 20 August 1894 agreement between Korea and Japan,⁴⁰ Tokyo pressed Seoul to relinquish the Gyeongbu Railway concession – from Seoul to Busan. Fortunately for St. Petersburg, determined to construct the railway itself, the Korean government rejected Tokyo's demand.⁴¹ Russia, however, could not rest its laurels. The Japanese head of the Seoul Residents Association, Yamaguchi Tabei, offered ¥50,000 to the Korean foreign minister not to turn over the Seoul-Uiju line to a French company, Fives-Lille.⁴² The Japanese Chamber of Commerce in Seoul and its Incheon, Busan, and Wonsan counterparts called for securing the Seoul-Busan railway construction rights. Yamaguchi justified their position in June 1896: "When the trans-Siberian railway is eventually completed, the [Seoul-Busan] line will connect our country with Russia, and [as] a main line piercing the European and

Asian continents, inevitably it will be of the utmost importance in the intercourse between East and West”.⁴³ A month later, another well-connected Japanese businessman, Maejima Hisoka, backed the Seoul-Busan railway concession, recognising the scheme’s potential importance: “The railways from the eastern end of the Korean peninsula . . . [are] a gateway to the great railways between Asia and Europe . . . if we take no notice . . . it will immediately pass into the hands of some other country”.⁴⁴

Keen interest in Korean railroads amongst Japan’s private sector seemed ironic as senior-level government officials were treading carefully. Itō and Foreign Minister Mutsu Munemitsu remained sceptical of the Seoul-Busan line’s profitability, given Korea’s weak economy and low population density.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Itō closely watched the other Powers’ possible responses opposing Japan’s control of the railway.⁴⁶ Russia searched for countermoves against Japan in Korea, although on non-official levels. On 30 July 1896, a tsarist railroad engineer, Tolmache, had submitted a policy recommendation to the Finance Ministry to construct a new line connecting Vladivostok and a port on Korea Bay. He argued that if a port in northwest Korea linked with the TSR, it would help Russia gain advantages in global trade and control the Korea Strait. Tolmache posited that Russia would then be able to block the advance of a third Power’s fleet into the East Sea and transform the Korean peninsula into a buffer.⁴⁷ In a report on 7 October 1896, an official at the Russo-Chinese Bank, Dimitri Dimitrievich Pokotilov, considered using Russia’s track gauge for Korean railroads.

Other Western Powers also pursued forward policies, making inroads on Korean railroad concessions. America worked with the moderate Russian *chargé d’affaires* to Korea, Karl Ivanovich Waeber, to adopt a European-style standard gauge for Korean railroads, whilst France acquired the Seoul-Uiju railroad concession to connect with a possible Russian-built railroad in

southern Korea.⁴⁸ Perhaps conducive to Russian interests foreshadowing St. Petersburg's expanding influence over Korean railroads, French action came with a *caveat*: Russia could only rely on the goodwill of France, its principal ally

Ultimately, Japan consumed most of Pokotilov's energy. Wondering whether the sudden departure of the Japanese minister to Korea presaged Japan taking a hard line on Korea, he noted that even this moderate official had requested that Korea's government furnish new details about the status of the Seoul-Busan railroad.⁴⁹ Then, on 22 October, Witte urged acting Foreign Minister Nikolay Shishkin to pressure Seoul to adopt Russian-style broad gauge. Witte faulted Gojong's edict of 15 July 1896 designating European-standard gauge for the construction of the Gyeongin Seoul-Incheon and Gyeongui Seoul-Uiju railroads. He foresaw potential difficulties for Russo-Korean trade if the soon-to-be-built CER adopted a narrower gauge: a different Russian standard from Korea's would cost time and money. Thus, Witte concluded that future Korean railroads use broad gauge and have Gojong's edict annulled.

Witte did not have to fear a negative Japanese reaction over his Korean railroad designs. On 14 November, Satow met with the influential Count Ōkuma Shigenobu, a former foreign minister, who asserted, "All that Japan desired was . . . the independence of Corea". Whilst seeking to take the Russian advance in Korean railroads lightly, Ōkuma acknowledged Tokyo's continued interest in important railways: "A line from Seoul to Fusan could not possibly be made a financial success, but one to Mokpo might . . . which gives access to the most fertile region in Corea". Witte eventually got his wish when Gojong found himself forced to proclaim a new edict selecting Russian-style broad gauge for Korean railroads, encapsulating the growing Korean alignment with Russia's strategic ambitions in the Far East.

Gojong's sudden *volte-face* may have induced Ōmiwa to return to Tokyo in December. Although blaming an economic recession in Japan for temporarily shelving the Seoul-Busan railroad project, Ōmiwa argued against its abandonment: "The Seoul-Pusan railway is a national issue and [its fate] should not be determined by the ups and downs of the economy".⁵⁰ His remark presaged that Korea's railroads would remain Japan's fixation. On 20 February 1897, Gojong returned to his palace from the Russian legation and established the Korean Empire on 12 October to counter better foreign intervention in the country's internal affairs and embark on comprehensive internal reforms to build up national strength capable of withstanding foreign pressures. Coincidentally, the conclusion of the Waeber-Komura memorandum of July 1896, allowing Russia to station troops in Korea and requiring Japan acknowledging Korea's pro-Russian bias, and Lobanov-Yamagata protocol established a relative balance of power on the peninsula, giving Gojong's government breathing space to pursue a more independent foreign policy.

Nonetheless, Japan's new prime minister, Matsukata Masayoshi, and his foreign minister, Ōkuma Shigenobu, were eager to regain the upper hand in Korea. Using the Foreign Ministry's advisor, H.W. Denison, an American, as a go-between, Ōkuma pushed for negotiations with an American investor, James Morse, to acquire the Seoul-Incheon railway.⁵¹ The idea was that Shibusawa would form a syndicate and offer ¥2,000,000 to Morse to purchase the railway after it was completed.⁵² In July, negotiations between Morse and the Shibusawa-led syndicate over transferring construction rights to the Seoul-Incheon railway broke down after the American demanded \$300,000. Concerned that the railway might fall to hostile Powers, Ōkuma arranged for the Yokohama Specie Bank to lend Morse \$500,000 in return for constructing the railroad and dropping his latest demand to the syndicate.⁵³

Spurred on by their government's active engagement in the race for the Seoul-Incheon railroad, the syndicate sought direct assistance from Tokyo. In October, asking for a ¥1,000,000 loan without any fixed date, syndicate leaders demanded the government guarantee an interest-free loan if the railway's annual profit fell below ¥50,000. To support this loan, Matsukata had a portion of the China indemnity deposited in the Yokohama Specie Bank as collateral.⁵⁴ Against this backdrop, Gojong held an audience with French minister to Korea, Victor Collin de Plancy. He called for an equal distribution of railroads amongst the major Powers to draw foreign capital and strategic focus to Korea,⁵⁵ claiming that multilateral engagement could constrain Japanese and Russian infringement on Korea's sovereignty; he did not mention that Korea would remain dependent on the imperial Powers. Interventions in unofficial channels further complicated Korea's already fraught concession diplomacy. A Korean pro-reform group, the Independence Club, comprised of enlightened young intellectuals and former bureaucrats, advocated a more independent, neutral foreign policy. More significantly, championing patriotic nationalism through their newspaper, *The Independent*, Club members pushed the government for at least some level of accountability by the major Powers.⁵⁶

Its sentiments towards foreign Powers were inconsistent, but the Club correctly understood Russia's strategic intent towards the Korean peninsula, demonstrated by a strongly-worded March 1897 policy report by the tsarist Finance Ministry chief of staff, Romanoff. Noting that Manchuria was nothing more than a passage to Korea, he sought a railroad that would reach an ice-free port on the Korean peninsula.⁵⁷ This proposal paved the way for Romanoff's support for creating the Russo-Korean Bank. With the Russia-controlled-CER serving as its holding company, this financial institution could inject 2.1 million roubles for

financing the construction of a new railroad from Manchuria to a Korean port.⁵⁸ An ice-free Korean port with access to the Pacific could serve as a CER terminal.⁵⁹

Determined to make economic inroads into the Korean peninsula, Witte's Finance Ministry wanted a Russian-sponsored Korean railroad project. In contrast, the Foreign Ministry preferred a more low-key approach, epitomised by Foreign Minister Mikhail Muraviev's stance towards Tokyo. Consequently, Japan's foreign minister, Nishi Tokujirō, was ready to proffer a Russian free hand in Manchuria for a Japanese one in Korea – passing a note concerning this subject to Baron Roman Romanovich Rosen, Russia's minister at Tokyo.⁶⁰ He later reported to Nishi that St. Petersburg was glad that Japan had acknowledged that Manchuria was not part of its sphere of interest.⁶¹ The mystifying aspect of such confusion amongst tsarist officialdom was that Russian influence in Korea was reaching a new high.⁶² In July 1897, three officers and ten non-commissioned officers were sent to Seoul to train Korean soldiers, and Alexis de Speyer, heading the Russian legation in Korea, worked diligently to secure tsarist economic and political privileges. Four months after its soldiers arrived, Russia secured control of Korean customs.

Outside Korea, however, Russia was making little headway. Although the Ussuri line from Vladivostok to Khabarovsk opened in 1897,⁶³ the Foreign Ministry and front-line diplomats like Waeber proved reluctant to pursue a more interventionist policy; the Finance Ministry still embraced a hard line. In an important sense, there seemed to be no “government” in Russia.⁶⁴ On 25 February 1898, Witte penned a text on the Gyeongin Railway concession, urging Deputy Foreign Minister Count Vladimir Nikolayevich Lamsdorff to sponsor Russian industrialists' purchase of this strategic railroad. Worried that Fives-Lille ceding the railway to the Russian government would complicate Russo-Japanese relations,⁶⁵ Witte suggested the

Russo-Korean Bank as a substitute.⁶⁶ His stance encapsulated the dilemma of maximising Russian interests in Korean railroads whilst not provoking a strong Japanese response.

Unlike Russia, Japan was having a little trouble in doubling down on its Korean railroad geostrategy, forcing the Russian *chargé d'affaires* to Korea, N.G. Matyunin, to pen an alarming report in 1897 on Japanese intrigues regarding the Gyeongbu Railway. Recalling a recent meeting with Japanese minister to Korea, Katō Matsuo, Matyunin claimed Japan acquired this railway to colonise its neighbour.⁶⁷ He also reported on John McLeavy Brown, the British chief commissioner of customs and financial advisor to the Korean government, and his unwillingness to co-operate with Russia.⁶⁸ It was no secret that with Anglo-Russian rivalry in Eurasia in full swing, any Russian action on the Korean peninsula would be interpreted as hostile towards Britain, especially its interests in continental Asia. Witte, however, refused to budge and in late December 1897 telegraphed Muravyev stressing the participation of foreign enterprises in the Seoul-Incheon railroad was impossible.⁶⁹ Even the usually cautious Muravyov instructed Matyunin in early January 1898 to monitor the railroad's status, as this vital concession should not fall to a foreign government.⁷⁰

Then, in mid-January 1898, Witte suddenly backpedalled from involving Russian institutions in its concession competition with Japan. Perhaps frustrated by the continued confusion surrounding ownership rights of the Seoul-Incheon railroad, he now opposed any Russian investment in Korean businesses, a decision officially couched in business terms, although the detrimental impact of persistent confusion amongst Russian officialdom surrounding a railroad concession was taking its toll.⁷¹ Despite facing such obstacles, individual Russian diplomats remained attentive to fresh developments regarding Korean railroads. On 29 January, Admiral Yevgeni Alexeiev, the Russian Far Eastern viceroy, reported an offer from a

Morse representative about the repayment of ¥750,000 to an unnamed Japanese bank in exchange for ending Japan's involvement.⁷² Though Witte asked Alexeiev not to take part in the Gyeongin Railway concession issue,⁷³ the latter would not budge.

Alexeiev noted that only by purchasing the Gyeongin Railway or obtaining its shares could Russia have the railway adopt its preferred gauge.⁷⁴ Subsequently, on 23 January 1898, an aide of the foreign minister delivered Matyunin's letter and an attachment on a conversation between him and the Paris branch manager of the Russo-Chinese Bank about the purchase of the railway through a syndicate comprising a French railroad company and the Russo-Chinese Bank. By requesting Witte's feedback,⁷⁵ the Foreign Ministry was intimating the Russian government's possible involvement in acquiring a key railroad concession. On 4 February, Alexeiev sought to push for a more forceful stance regarding the Gyeongin and Gyeongui railways, referring to an offer from a Fives-Lille representative. He revealed that in return for St Petersburg covering four percent of its annual income, the company promised to purchase Morse's company and construct an Incheon-Seoul-Uiju rail-line.⁷⁶

Intervention from France's ambassador to Russia, Gustave Lannes de Montebello, followed Alexeiev's report on Russian policy towards Korean railroads. By sharing a copy of a letter from the representative of Fives-Lille, which invited the tsarist government to buy the entire railroad line in return for compensation of its lost profits, France sought to leverage the Franco-Russian alliance for mutual benefits. Lamsdorff, now foreign minister, thought this suggestion merited serious consideration, prompting the Foreign Ministry to review its Korean policy.⁷⁷ Subsequent developments surrounding the Gyeongin Railroad concession, however, showed that time was not in Russia's side. In late April, the American minister to Korea, Horace Newton Allen, wrote Matyunin that a Japanese syndicate loan could underwrite the railroad's

construction.⁷⁸ Russia was inadvertently letting Japan race ahead in their rivalry over Korea. Concurrently, Japan was setting its gaze on the Seoul-Busan railway concession. Matsuo played a critical role in inducing Gojong's government to grant this railway to Japan.⁷⁹ He also worked with Takeuchi Tsuna and Ōe Taku, a director of the Tokyo Stock Exchange, to curb the activities of the Independence Club, perhaps finding its advocacy of neutral and independent foreign policies detrimental to Japanese interests in Korean railroads.⁸⁰

Fulfilling such ambitions was not without challenges. Feigning the possible reaction from Russia, many Korean officials favoured building the Seoul-Busan railway independently or giving construction rights to an American concessionaire.⁸¹ Nevertheless, Katō could still rest easy, as Allen was unwilling to undermine Japan's designs on Korean railroads. Now that Morse was seeking to sell his stake in the Seoul-Incheon line, the American diplomat offered two Japan-friendly alternatives to the Korean government in July. The first would have Korea borrow from Japan to build and operate the line. The second would include the Seoul-Busan route and have the Japanese syndicate complete it. Both options would benefit America's economic interests, as Japan could purchase construction materials, rolling stock, and other related materials from the United States.⁸² More crucially, Allen noted that even the Korean finance minister favoured granting a railroad concession to Tokyo.⁸³

The Nishi-Rosen protocol of 25 April 1898 gave Japan another reason to feel more confident about its geopolitical standing in Korea. Devised to allow both Powers to pursue their respective interests on the Korean peninsula, it enabled Japan to pursue "unnoticed peaceful penetration", enabling it to make headway on railroad concessions in Korea.⁸⁴ Wrapped in geopolitics and keen to establish a Pacific-based fleet in Vladivostok and Manchuria's Port Arthur, St. Petersburg desired free passage in the Korea Straits, hoping to lease a port in southern

Korea.⁸⁵ An additional twist to these intrigues was that some Koreans felt their country should adopt defensive mechanisms – however ineffective – to preserve its fragile sovereignty amidst the latest round of Russo-Japanese railroad competition. On 6 July, the Koreans established the Directorate of Railroads, with Yongik Yi as its supervisor, to preserve public railroads, approve and administer private railroads, disburse taxes, oversee expenses, and purchase and store expropriated goods.

Furthermore, on 21 August, the Korean government contemplated surveying routes for independent construction of Seoul-Mokpo, Seoul-Wonsan-Gyeongheung, Wonsan-Pyongyang-Jinnampo and Gyeongheung-Uiju railroads. These four lines would facilitate Korean economic development.⁸⁶ Unofficial circles in Korea also stepped up efforts to have their say in railroad concessions. On 29 October, the Independence Club submitted six policy recommendations to Gojong, including for Korean railroads. Having commended the government's refusal to grant the Gyeongwon Railway – Seoul to Wonsan – to the German firm, Heinrich Constantin Edward Meyer and Company, the Club now demanded the government grant concessions only after obtaining joint signatures from the cabinet and chair of the High State Council.⁸⁷ Under these circumstances, an ex-Korean official, Byeonghun Jeon, attempted to direct Gojong's attention towards Korean neutralisation. As a former bureaucrat, Jeon might have been able to devise a pragmatic solution, having witnessed the impact of his government's foreign policy in the geopolitical landscape of the Far East. Neutralisation could at least mitigate the effects of the Russo-Japanese tug-of-war over Korea and, by extension, its railroads.

On 1 January 1899, Jeon submitted a memorial to Gojong, drawing on the *Gongbeop pyeollam* – *Handbook of International Law* – to scrutinise Belgium and Switzerland's experiences as independent and neutral states. He contended that Korea could emulate their

success by despatching official correspondence to friendly countries and by receiving their recognition within two or three years, thereby help Korea avoid external aggression. Gojong deemed Jeon's memorial appropriate,⁸⁸ yet did not pursue a follow-up measure. He may have balked at neutralisation's effectiveness as a balancing mechanism on the international stage.

Worse was to come. In February 1899, under pressure, the Korean government signed a new loan agreement specifying that Seoul repay its 1895 loan to Tokyo in instalments. On 14 March, Tokyo unveiled another scheme requiring that Gojong's government borrow ¥1,000,000 from a Japanese syndicate to advance the Gyeongin Railway project, manifesting a close connexion between railroad concessions and loans. Apart from increasing Japan's financial leverage over Korea, these measures would enable the Japanese to pass to Korea's government at least some of the operating losses incurred from operating the Gyeongin Railway.⁸⁹ Furthermore, Russia's minister to Korea, Alexander Ivanovich Pavloff, deduced that not blind to Japan's ulterior motives, Brown was working to build a rapport with Kato. The Russian diplomat tried to warn the Korean foreign minister about Japan's real intentions but failed.⁹⁰

Meanwhile, Fives-Lille faced unexpected hurdles in its railroad project. Although the company initially acquired the Gyeongui Railway, a lack of capital and a deliberate French policy of enhanced disengagement from Korea meant no tangible benefits accrued from maintaining the railway.⁹¹ Because French financial assistance was helping to construct the TSR, Russia could not extend similar support to Fives-Lille.⁹² Whilst Fives-Lille benefited from the Korean government's goodwill towards a third Power, once it embarked on the formal construction process, it lacked inadequate capital. Thus, in late May, Fives-Lille approached Tokyo about transferring its railway concession. In a surprising turn of events, Japanese officials were unable to act on this offer: Japan's domestic consensus now favoured constructing the

Gyeongbu Railway first.⁹³ A large-scale military build-up was another distracting factor; on 5 April, Satow privately noted, “Japanese naval and military preparations are not ready yet”. Displaying remarkable foresight, he predicted that when the TSR was finished in five years, “a great struggle will take place”.⁹⁴ He failed to predict the exact date for the Russo-Japanese war, but grasped the strategic importance of the TSR in Russo-Japanese rivalry.

Japan also had to reckon with Russian designs on the port of Masampo, the starting point of Japan’s railroad project in Korea.⁹⁵ The Russian navy was attempting to obtain a parcel of land at Masampo, which compelled Colonel Tamura Iyozō to obtain landing facilities there for the potential use of the Japanese army. Tamura recognised the strategic importance of the Korean port: “if Russia gets her hands on Masampo, Japan must become useless”.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, the Korean government dabbled in efforts again to construct a railway independently; it awarded the rights to build the Gyeongwon Railway in June to the private Korea Railroad and Delivery Service Company. A month later, the Company received the equivalent right for the Gyeongui Railway after Fives-Lille lost its construction rights.⁹⁷ Despite these steps, the Korean company failed to raise sufficient capital for railroad projects. Eventually, Gojong’s government stepped into the breach, delegating railroad-related duties to the Imperial Household Department and creating the Railroad Bureau on 1 April 1900 to administer the Gyeongin⁹⁸ and Gyeongbu⁹⁹ railways. Korea was indicating that even if a foreign Power received these concessions, Seoul would administer and supervise the resulting railroads. On 13 September, Korea’s government founded the Northwestern Railroad Bureau, with Yongik as president, to construct the Gyeongui and Gyeongwon railways under the direct control of the Imperial Household Department.¹⁰⁰

As Korea contemplated ways to revive its stalled railroad-building programme, Russia toyed with Korean neutrality in January 1901, looking to counterbalance the increased influence

of Japan on the Korean peninsula. Working through its minister in Japan, Alexander Petrovich Izvolsky, St. Petersburg sought to revisit the Nish-Rosen protocol, aware that Tokyo used this accord to increase its geo-economic presence on the Korean peninsula through railways, telegraph, banking, and other means. Hirobumi was interested in taking up this offer, but not his foreign minister Katō Takaaki: “The 1898 protocol is still in force and seems to work fairly well . . . it would be well to postpone negotiations until the status quo ante [in Manchuria] shall have been restored”.¹⁰¹ Japan was unwilling to entertain Korean neutrality, considering it unconnected with the Russo-Japanese competition over their respective spheres of influence. Such a stance meant that the Russo-Japanese rivalry over Korean railroads would heat up in the absence of a stabilising mechanism – neutrality. Concluded on 30 January 1902, the Anglo-Japanese alliance identified Russia as a chief rival in the Far East. More strikingly, Article 1 of the agreement stipulated that Japan had a special stake in Korean politics and economy.¹⁰² This provision strengthened Japan’s hand in the Russo-Japanese contest over Korean railroads, with the *Japan Times* reckoning that Article 1 was “a powerful factor in shaping the course of events in the Extreme East”.¹⁰³

What could easily be described as a unilateral move by Japan against the regional balance of power may have been caused by Russia exploiting the anti-Great Power Boxer Uprising in China in June 1900 as an ideal opportunity to occupy Manchuria. Having identified Korean railroads as a strategic link for Japan’s expansion into Manchuria, Tokyo had to respond to the Russian offensive there. Accordingly, when the hard liner, Komura Jutarō, became foreign minister in September 1901, Japan quickly pushed for a more detailed plan to control the Gyeongui Railway. By acquiring this concession, it could pose a serious threat to Russia, as the completed railway would terminate in Manchuria.¹⁰⁴ Japan also contemplated extending a loan

to Korea¹⁰⁵ and, with the Gyeongui Railway and maritime customs revenue as collateral, such an action would strengthen Tokyo's grip on the Korean economy.¹⁰⁶

Backed by the successful conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, Komura's hard line Korean policy affected Korea's domestic politics. The pro-Japan faction in Seoul became the dominant political force, pushing through its hegemonic agenda for Korean railroads. Even Yongik, a non-faction member, found himself sidelined after failing to introduce the French-backed Unnam syndicate loan in April 1901.¹⁰⁷ Still, Russia felt it was losing a strategic edge over Japan in the Far East. St. Petersburg already faced the possible acceleration of the open door policy in Manchuria by signing a Russo-Chinese Convention on the evacuation of Manchuria on 8 April 1902. Moreover, America's growing rapprochement with Britain and Japan further complicated Russia's desire to maintain its influence in Manchuria.¹⁰⁸

Thus, instead of directly challenging Japanese efforts to dominate Korean railroads, the Russians decided on a diplomatic option to reshape the geopolitics of the Korean peninsula, imposing some constraints on growing Japanese domination over railroads. Such a rationale explains why in September 1902, Pavloff decided to join Izvolsky and the Russian ambassador at Washington, Arturo Cassini, to press for Korea's neutralisation. On 31 July 1902, he travelled to Tokyo to confer with Izvolsky about neutralisation under a joint Russo-Japanese-American guarantee. Then, in early September, he went to Paris to discuss the plan with Cassini.¹⁰⁹ Afterwards the three diplomats formed a consensus over the execution of their joint proposal, counting on American support.¹¹⁰ The three may have sought to involve the United States because of its substantial economic interests in Korea and lingering pro-American sympathies there. In addition, the purported inclination of Washington to accept Russia's stake in Manchuria may have convinced them that the United States would likewise accept Russia's Korean

policy.¹¹¹ Their optimism lay with John Hay, the American secretary of state.¹¹² As long as guaranteeing freedom of American commerce and enterprises in Manchuria, the United States would not interrupt Russian activities.

Meanwhile, America's minister to Japan, Alfred Eliab Buck, alerted Komura about the Russian diplomats' neutralisation scheme, prompting Komura to wire his minister at St. Petersburg, Kurino Shin'ichiro, on 9 September to monitor the plan's progress. Komura asked Buck to relay his hopes directly to Washington that if Russia made approaches about Korean neutralisation, it would consult with Tokyo. He also declared that Japan would not accept any move to change its current position in Korea and that the Russian diplomats' plan could threaten Japan's position in Korea.¹¹³ The next day, Komura instructed Kurino to forward the contents of his message to other foreign representatives in France and the United States and ordered Japan's minister at Washington, Takahira Kogorō, to monitor Cassini closely, as well as the American attitude towards the Russian proposition.¹¹⁴ Whilst not explicitly stated, the Japanese diplomatic establishment was wary of Russo-American co-operation in Korea, although Buck's action showed little chance for such collaboration.

On 22 September, Komura divulged the Russian diplomats' neutralisation plan to Hayashi and expressed concern about Waeber's upcoming visit to Korea. Even though Lamsdorff attempted to address Kurino's anxiety by reassuring him that Waeber's visit had nothing to do with Korean neutralisation, Komura dreaded the possibility the neutralisation debate retaking centre stage. To avoid this scenario, Katō tried to turn the three Russian diplomats' plan to Japan's advantage.¹¹⁵ On 6 October, Hay told Takahira that America had not received any Russian request to consider Korean neutralisation. Unwilling to take any chances, Takahira met Hay three more times to disrupt Russia's designs. He discerned that the United States had neither

considered participating in the joint guarantee nor received a Korean neutrality proposal from Russians.¹¹⁶ The Japanese diplomat once again spoke to Hay on 2 September 1903 about the neutralisation proposal and came away convinced that it had not reached the United States.¹¹⁷

In an October 1902 report, Hayashi speculated about a possible neutralisation discussion between Korea and Russia during Waeber's visit to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Gojong's accession to the throne. Hayashi conjectured that Waeber might join hands with some pro-Russian faction members, surmising these marginalised political elites looked to recover their influence within the Korean government.¹¹⁸ Around this time, Allen asked Hayashi Gonsuke, a senior Foreign Ministry official, about the three Russian diplomats' proposal. Hayashi replied that Japan did not support it because the Russian government was using it to secure freedom of manoeuvre in Manchuria, and he later added that since the Russian diplomats' proposal violated the open door policy, Japan would not accept it. Hayashi also said if the American government shared this view, it should approve of Japan's decision.¹¹⁹ Having sensed a crisis due to Komura's hard-line posture in Korea and the establishment of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, the three Russian diplomats' initiative strongly reflected the tsar's view.¹²⁰ Given this reality, despite its evident setback, the proposal was Russia's countermove against Japan, whose position in the Far East was strengthening through the Anglo-Japanese alliance.¹²¹

Going forward, several issues further threatened the *status quo* in Russo-Japanese competition over Korea. These involved suspending the scheduled second-round withdrawal of Russian troops from Manchuria on 8 April 1903, the outline of seven conditions for their withdrawal on 18 April, and Russia's occupation of Yongampo on 21 April to construct a strategic post under the guise of a logging venture on 4 May.¹²² It inevitably had important implications for the railroads, as Japan might interpret these moves as Russian willingness to

expand its Manchurian and Korean interests.¹²³ To rub salt into the wound, the British minister at Seoul and his Japanese counterpart pressured Gojong into declaring the opening of the Yalu River to trade.¹²⁴ Feeling desperate, the Russians looked for a strategic opening to redress the situation. On 22 May, a financier and *confidante* of Nicholas II, Aleksandr Mikhailovich Bezobrazov, insisted in not allowing Japan to extend its influence into northern Korea. He also argued that Russia should receive concessions corresponding to Japan's construction rights for the Gyeongbu and Gyeongui railways.¹²⁵ However, St. Petersburg soon realised the difficulty in matching intentions with deeds, given Japanese moves in Korea. Pavloff reported that Brown was working with the Japanese minister to have the Korean government proclaim Yongampo an open port.¹²⁶ Moreover, buoyed by the perceived weaknesses of Russian forces and regarding Japan and Russia as now on an equal military footing, the Japanese Army Chief of Staff Ōyama Iwao maintained that now was the time to settle the Korea problem.¹²⁷

At this critical juncture, out of desperation, Gojong resorted to neutralisation.¹²⁸ He despatched two close aides –Yeongun Hyeon to Japan on 3 August¹²⁹ and Sanggeon Hyeon to Europe 18 days later – to seek support for Korea's wartime neutrality.¹³⁰ Sanggeon Hyeon carried a letter from Gojong pushing for accelerating Russo-Korean co-operation, hoping to prevent a Japanese invasion of the peninsula in the event of Russo-Japanese war.¹³¹ His European trip was notable for ascertaining French and Russian views on Korean neutralisation and seeking international mediation.¹³² The mission marked a significant departure for Korea, involving direct communication with potential allies for Korean neutralisation. Sanggeon Hyeon first tried to arrange a meeting with French foreign minister, Théophile Déclassé. When this failed, a Korean envoy left a copy of a secret message from Gojong to Yeongchan Min, the Korean minister in France, regarding neutrality.¹³³ Sanggeon Hyeon then considered attending

the International Peace Conference and visiting the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, but neither was in session. He finally travelled to St. Petersburg, conferring with Korea's minister to Russia, Beomjin Yi, about neutrality and meeting with Waeber. On his journey back to Korea, Sanggeon Hyeon stopped at Lüshun, where he spoke with the Russian governor of the Far East.¹³⁴ For all his efforts, Hyeon could not receive any tangible support for Korean neutrality.¹³⁵ In Japan, Komura tried to use the Korean overture to push instead for a bilateral Korean-Japanese alliance.¹³⁶ Although having invested considerable political capital in pushing his neutralisation drive through direct diplomacy, Gojong could not receive reliable support from the international community.

Korea's neutralisation drive may have hit a roadblock, but that did not stop Russia from presenting a separate initiative to Japan on 3 October, which included designating a neutral zone north of the 39th parallel of the Korean peninsula.¹³⁷ Komura rebuffed the Russian olive branch in a counterproposal four weeks later.¹³⁸ Determined to connect the Gyeongui Railway with Manchuria, Japan demanded St. Petersburg not disrupt the expansion of this line into Manchuria.¹³⁹ In the end, Japan was unable to bridge any differences on Korea and Manchuria with Russia, and bilateral attempts to break the diplomatic deadlock ended. On 6 February 1904, the Japanese government unilaterally decided to construct the Gyeongui Railway to transport troops to the front line, and two days later, the Russo-Japanese war broke out when the Japanese navy launched a surprise attack on Russian warships at Port Arthur. On 21 February, the Japanese Army established a temporary unit in charge of maintaining military continental railways, aiming to incorporate them in Japanese military operations.¹⁴⁰

The end of Korea's fragile hold on its railroads came on 23 February when the fourth article of a new Korean-Japanese protocol granted Japan the use of all Korea for military

purposes.¹⁴¹ Japan could now use this accord as diplomatic cover to justify controlling Korea's major railways and advance Japan's hegemonic interests regarding those in Manchuria. Japan's success in obtaining control of Korean railroads reversed Russian advantages. After completing the CER in 1903, St. Petersburg initially expected this strategic line to enhance its military activities in the Far East. With war between Japan and Russia drawing closer, the tsar's government sought to develop the CER further "to make it a more efficient military carrier".¹⁴² Such a step would have enabled more rapid transportation of its troops into Harbin in Manchuria and force Japan to counter with costly defensive measures.¹⁴³ In the end, hemmed in by adverse geographical conditions for fighting in Manchuria – crossing Siberia's Lake Baikal with reinforcements and supplies during the winter was only possible with an icebreaker and sleds – and inflexible military strategy, Russia sorely missed access to strategic railroads. In contrast, Japan easily relied on Korea's railroads, and Japanese military forces outpaced their Russian counterparts in terms of logistics and supply, at least in the initial phases of the conflict.

In this analysis, Russo-Japanese rivalry over the Korean peninsula occurred within the context of railroad concessions, with neutralisation playing a complementary role. Focusing on major issues related to these important subjects, scholars can form a more nuanced understanding of Korea's close connexion with Far Eastern geopolitics, imperial rivalries, and the balance of power. Russo-Japanese rivalry over the Korean peninsula would formally conclude after Russia's defeat in the 1904-1905 war. The Treaty of Portsmouth ending the struggle on 5 September 1905 granted Japan economic and political supremacy over Korea, and Tokyo used this treaty as a stepping-stone to consolidate its hegemony over the Korean peninsula. It meant Korea's railroads would also fall firmly under Japanese control. In the final analysis, Korea was unable to protect a potentially valuable asset from foreign encroachment. Forced to outsource

railroad construction and authority to foreign Powers, Korea's fate was soon no longer under its control. Those Powers were determined to maximise their own hegemonic ambitions or commercial interests in the Far East by manipulating Korean railroad concessions.

Notes

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² Gang Seonghak, *Siberia hoengdan yeolcha wa samurai* (Seoul, 1999).

³ Yi Cheolwu, "Ilbon cheoldo buuseol gwa Hanguk minjok juuiui jeohang", *Pyeonghwa yeongu*, 12/2(2004), 87-117.

⁴ Jeong Taeheon, *Hanbando cheoldo ui jeongchi gyeongjehak—ilje ui chimryak toongro eseo Dongbuga gongdongche ui pyenoghwa cheoldoro* (Seoul, 2017).

⁵ Inoue Yūichi [Seok Hwajeong and Bak Yangsin, editors and translators] *Dongasia cheoldo gukje gwangyesa: Yeongil dongmaeng seongrip gwa byeonjil gwajeong/An International History of East Asian Railroads: The Formation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Process of Deterioration* (Seoul, 2005).

⁶ Yoshihisa, *Japanese Manchuria*.

⁷ Ian Nish, *The Origins of the Russo-Japanese War* (NY, 1985).

⁸ Steven J. Ericson, *The Sound of the Whistle: Railroad and the State in Meiji Japan* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

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¹⁰ Baek Jungi, *Eurasia jeguk ui tansaeng: Eurasia oegyo ui giwon* (Seoul, 2014), 579-80.

¹¹ Charles and Barbara Jelavich, eds., *Russia in the East, 1876-1880* (Leiden, 1959), 122-31.

¹² Baek, *Eurasia jeguk ui tansaeng*, 582.

¹³ Andrew Malozemoff, *Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881-1904: With Special Emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War* (NY, 1977), 20-26.

¹⁴ Baek, *Eurasia jeguk ui tansaeng*, p. 582.

¹⁵ Subsequent developments in Russian railway building encompassed China. One route extended from Lake Baikal to Vladivostok passing Harbin, the second from Harbin and Dalian. Eventually, the first railway was the Chinese Eastern Railway; the other, the South Manchurian line: Nish, *Russo-Japanese War*, 17.

¹⁶ The TSR reflected the tsarist finance minister's, Sergei Witte's, industrialisation strategy of reimbursing interest on loans from Europe with profits from Russia's trade with Asia: Deokgyu Choe, *Jejeong Russia ui hanbando jeongchaek 1891-1907* (Seoul, 2008), 6.

¹⁷ Patrikeeff and Shukman, *Transporting War*, 3.

¹⁸ Jeong, *Hanbando cheoldo ui jeongchi gyeongjehak*, 34.

¹⁹ Harmon Tupper, *To the Great Ocean: The Taming of Siberia and the Building of the Trans-Siberian Railway* (London, 1965), 81-85.

²⁰ Nish, *Russo-Japanese War*, 15.

²¹ V.I. Bovykin, "The Franco-Russian Alliance", *History*, 64/210(1979), 20-35.

²² Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea, 1895-1910* (Berkeley, CA, 1995), 137.

²³ For more details on this incident, see Jin Sangpil, “The Port Hamilton (Geomundo) Incident (1885-1887): Retracing another Great Game in Eurasia”. *International History Review*, 41/2(2019), 280-303.

²⁴ Baek, *Eurasia jeguk ui tansaeng*, 589.

²⁵ Ōyama Azusa, *Yamagata Aritomo ikensho* (Tokyo, 1966), 215-22.

²⁶ Kim Seungyeong, “The Russo-Japanese Rivalry over Korean Buffer at the Beginning of the 20th Century and Its Implications”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 16/4(2005), 621.

²⁷ Duss, *Abacus and the Sword*, 137.

²⁸ Ibid., 138.

²⁹ Chōsen Sōtokufu Tetsudōkyoku, *Chōsen tetsudō shi* (Seoul, 1915), 28-29.

³⁰ Ibid., 34-42.

³¹ Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 139.

³² *Nihon gaikō bunsho*, Volume 28, Part 2 (Tokyo, 1947), 14-18.

³³ George A. Lensen, *Korea and Manchuria between Russia and Japan 1895-1904: The Observations of Sir Ernest Satow British Minister Plenipotentiary to Japan (1895-1900) and China (1900-1906)* (Tallahassee, FL, 1966), 43.

³⁴ Satow to Salisbury (268), 27 September 1895, FO [Foreign Office Records, The National Archives, Kew] 405/65, ff 29-30.

³⁵ Sergei Witte [Abraham Yarmolinski, editor and translator], *The Memoirs of Count Witte* (London, 1921), 90-96. Witte’s push for a branch line to connect an ice-free port on the Liaodong peninsula with northwest Korea revealed a close link between Russia’s naval doctrine and the geopolitics of the Korean peninsula: Choe, *Jejeong Russia*, 11

³⁶ William L. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism, 1890- 1902* (NY, 1965), 407.

³⁷ Seong Hwangyong, *Geundae Dongyang oegyosa* (Seoul, 2005), 268.

³⁸ Witte, *Memoirs*, 97-98.

³⁹ Bak Jaeman, ed., *Reosia munseo beonyeokjip*, Volume VI: *gundae Han-Reo gwangye yeongu* (Seoul, 2011), 60.

⁴⁰ An agreement between the Korean foreign minister, Yunshik Kim, and the Japanese minister to Korea, Keisuke, promised the granting of Gyeongin and Gyeongbu railroad construction rights to either the Japanese government or a Japanese company: Jeong, *Hanbando cheoldo ui jeongchi gyeongjehak*, 49.

⁴¹ *Dongnip sinmun* (15 August 1896).

⁴² *Chōsen tetsudō shi*, 59.

⁴³ Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 141.

⁴⁴ In Janet Hunter, “Japanese Government Policy, Business Opinion, and the Seoul-Pusan Railroad, 1894-1906”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 11/4(1977), 580-81.

⁴⁵ Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 141.

⁴⁶ Gaimushō, ed., *Komura gaikōshi*, Volume I (Tokyo, 1953), 102.

⁴⁷ Choe, *Jejeong Russia*, 11.

⁴⁸ Kim Jongheon et al., eds., *Reosia munseo beonyeokjip*, Volume I: *geundae Han-Reo gwangye yeongu* (Seoul, 2008), 41.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁰ Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 142.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵² Ryūmonsha, ed., *Shibusawa Eiichi denki shiryō*, Volume 16 (Tokyo, 1957), 516-24.

⁵³ Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 143.

⁵⁴ Ryūmonsha, *Shibusawa Eiichi denki shiryō*, 16, 525-42.

⁵⁵ Hanguk gyohoesa yeonguso, ed., *Mutel chugyo ilgi*, Volume II: 1896-1900 (Seoul, 1993), 156-59.

⁵⁶ Kim, “Korean Buffer”, 625-66.

⁵⁷ Choe, *Jejeong Russia*, p. 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶⁰ The note stated that in return for Russia agreeing to Japan’s responsibility to give advice and assistance to Korea, the Japanese government would recognise that Manchuria and its coastline lay beyond Tokyo’s sphere of interest: *Nihon gaikō bunsho*, 31/1(1954), Number 583.

⁶¹ Nish, *Russo-Japanese War*, 46.

⁶² George A. Lensen, *Balance of Intrigue: International Rivalry in Korea and Manchuria, 1884-1899*, Volume I (Tallahassee, FL, 1982), 676-79.

⁶³ Nish, *Russo-Japanese War*, 16.

⁶⁴ Benedict H. Sumner, *Tsardom and Imperialism in the Far East and Middle East, 1880-1904* (London, 1968), 6.

⁶⁵ Kim *et al.*, *Reosia munseo beonyeokjip*, I, 191.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 213.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷² Ibid., 218.

⁷³ Ibid., 219.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 220.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 222.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 221.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 223.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 229.

⁷⁹ Saiga Hirochika, *Ōe Tenya denki* (Tokyo, 1926), 638.

⁸⁰ Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 146.

⁸¹ Allen to Colbran, 24 July 1898, in Horace N. Allen, *Allen Papers*, Press Book, Number 6, 439.

⁸² “Speech to Naval War College”, Ibid., Press Book Number 9, 59.

⁸³ Allen to Morse, 28 July, 1898, Ibid., Press Book Number 6, 441.

⁸⁴ Ian Nish, “Stretching Out to the Yalu: A Contested Frontier, 1900-1903”, in John W. Steinberg *et al.*, *The Russo-Japanese War in Global Perspective World War Zero* (Leiden, 2005), 53.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 54.

⁸⁶ Jeong, *Hanbando cheoldo ui jeongchi gyeongjehak*, 52.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 51.

⁸⁸ 1 January 1899, Guksa pyeonchan winwonhoe, ed., *Gojong sillok*, Volume 39: http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kza_13601001_003.

⁸⁹ Kim *et al.*, *Reosia munseo beonyeokjip*, I, 231.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 232.

⁹¹ Cheoldocheong, *Hanguk cheoldo baeknyeonsa* (Seoul, 1999), 73.

⁹² Jeong, *Hanbando cheoldo ui jeongchi gyeongjehak*, 90.

⁹³ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁴ Lensen, *Korea and Manchuria*, 121.

⁹⁵ Nish, *Russo-Japanese War*, 60.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁹⁷ Jeong, *Hanbando cheoldo ui jeongchi gyeongjehak*, 51.

⁹⁸ The Gyeongin Joint-Stock Company broke ground for the Gyeongin Railway, covering 33.8 kilometres, on 18 September 1899. It was to control a key passage linking Seoul and Incheon, allowing Tokyo to prepare for a possible war with Russia: Ibid., 77.

⁹⁹ To decide on the specific route for the Gyeongbu Railway, the Japanese government carried out five on-site surveys. In particular, the third – 1899 – envisioned a route penetrating the plains of Gyeonggi, Chungcheong, Gyeongsang and North Jeolla provinces. On 6 and 8 February 1900, Japan's House of Representatives and House of Peers passed resolutions regarding the Gyeongbu Railway, believing that it would serve as Asia's artery to China and continental Europe. Jeong, *Hanbando cheoldo ui jeongchi gyeongjehak*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰¹ *Nihon gaikō bunsho*, 34, Document 399, 526.

¹⁰² Kim *et al.*, *Reosia munseo beonyeokjip*, I, 458.

¹⁰³ *Japan Times* (13 February 1902).

¹⁰⁴ Bak Huiho, *Guhanmal Hanbando jungniphwaron yeongu* (PhD Dissertation, Dongguk University, 1997), 151-52.

¹⁰⁵ Japan would extend a short-term loan worth ¥720,000 to Korea in 1902 and early 1905: Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁶ Moriyama Shigenori, *Geundae Il-Han gwangyesa yeongu* (Seoul, 1994), 102-03.

¹⁰⁷ *Nihon gaikō bunsho*, 34, Document 417, 548-52.

¹⁰⁸ Seok Hwajeong, “Reosia ui Hanbando jungniphwa jeongchaek – Witte ui dae Manju jeongchaek gwa gwallyeonhayeo”, *Jungso yeongu*, 83(1999), 178.

¹⁰⁹ After meeting Cassini on his way back to Russia, Pavloff met with Izvolsky again to fine-tune their Korean neutralisation plan: *Nihon gaikō bunsho*, 35, Document 182, 393-94.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Document 191, 399-402.

¹¹¹ Moriyama, *Geundae Il-Han gwangyesa yeongu*, 138.

¹¹² Edward H. Zabriskie, *American-Russian Rivalry In The Far East: A Study in Diplomacy and Power Politics 1895-1914* (NY, 1973), 85.

¹¹³ *Nihon gaikō bunsho*, 35, Document 182, 393.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Document 183, 394-95.

¹¹⁵ Bak Huiho, *Guhanmal Hanbando jungniphwaron yeongu*, 158.

¹¹⁶ *Nihon gaikō bunsho*, 35, Document 191, 192, 399-404.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36/1, Document 194, 448.

¹¹⁸ Hayashi assumed that some members of the pro-Russia faction in Korea were intent on using Waeber’s visit to Seoul to revitalise Korean neutrality: *Gaimushō kiroku*, MT. 1.4.1.30, 22 October 1902, 198-204.

¹¹⁹ *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 35, Document 69, 194-96, Document 71, 198-99, Document 77, 202-03.

¹²⁰ Dominic Lieven, *Towards the Flame: Empire, War and the End of Tsarist Russia* (London, 2016), 67.

¹²¹ Bak Huiho, *Guhanmal Hanbando jungniphwaron yeongu*, 163.

¹²² Seong Hwangyong, *Geundae Dongyang oegyosa* (Seoul, 2005), 234.

¹²³ Referred to as the “New Course”, the Russian government arrived at this policy through special conferences – April-May 1903 – to fine-tune tsarist Far Eastern strategies: Hyeon Gwangho, *Daehan jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon* (Seoul, 2007), 203.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 208.

¹²⁵ Bak Jonghyo, ed., *Reosia gunnip munseo bogwanso sojang hanguk gwallyeon yoyakjip* (Seoul, 2002), p. 735.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 601.

¹²⁷ Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 177.

¹²⁸ Go Yeonghui [Korean minister to Japan] telegram, 4 July 1903, Gwangho, *Daehan jeguk gwa Reosia geurigo Ilbon*, 220 urgently reported that Tokyo had concluded that a war with Russia was inevitable; it seemed to have forced the embattled Korean government to turn to neutrality.

¹²⁹ Hyeon also reportedly carried Gojong’s secret letter to query Itō and Komura about the recent state of affairs in the Far East. Gojong tasked Hyeon to gauge accurately the Japanese government’s Manchurian policy and discern Japanese views on Korea: *Nihon gaikō bunsho* 36/1, Document 715, 740-42.

¹³⁰ *Hwangseong sinmun* (3 July 1903).

¹³¹ Seo Yeonghui, “Reo-II jeonjaenggi Daehan jeguk jipgweon seryeok ui siguk daeung”, *Yeoksa wa hyeonsil*, 25(1997), 188.

¹³² Guksa pyeonchan wiwonhoe, ed., *Chukan Nihon koshikan kirok* (Gwacheon, 1997), Number 247.

¹³³ Min might have appealed to the French government to entice Russia to ensure Korean neutrality: Gwangho, *Daehan jeguk ui daeoe jeongchaek*, 119.

¹³⁴ *Hwangseong sinmun* (20 August 1903) and (12 October 1903).

¹³⁵ Gwangho, *Daehan jeguk ui daeoe jeongchaek*, 120.

¹³⁶ Duus, *Abacus and the Sword*, 179.

¹³⁷ *Nihon gaikō bunsho*, 36/1, Number 25, 22-23.

¹³⁸ Under this counterproposal, creation of a neutral zone – 50 kilometres – would occur on each side of the Manchuria-Korean border. *Ibid.*, Number 28, 29, 31, 25-28.

¹³⁹ Jeong, *Hanbando cheoldo ui jeongchi gyeongjehak*, 93.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 97-101.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁴² Patrikeeff and Shukman, *Transporting War*, 46.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48.